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ABSTRACT

Information about the career progression, personal traits, attitudes, and employment experiences of women principals in Further Education (FE) colleges in the United Kingdom was gathered from the following: literature search; questionnaire sent to all 68 female principals in the United Kingdom (response rate, 76%); and structured interviews with a sample of 12 principals representing colleges with small, medium, and large financial turnover. Of the respondents, 32% had worked part time in education at some point in their career, 73% were living with a partner, all were white, and none was disabled. All 12 described their management style as participative or consultative. Only 6% reported planning their career "to a considerable extent," and most reported encountering significant sexism in their early careers. When asked for their advice to other women aspiring to senior posts in FE, many respondents emphasized the importance of considering the demands of the job on them and their families. Respondents acknowledged the existence of the glass ceiling and cautioned aspiring female principals to be prepared "to work harder than most men." (The bibliography contains 32 references. Appended are the following: survey questions; interview questions; and respondents' advice to women aspiring to senior roles in FE.) (MN)

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FEDA Further Education Development Agency

Women at the top in further education

Clare Stott and Liz Lawson

report

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FEDA Further Education Development Agency

Women at the top in further education

Clare Stott and Liz Lawson

feda report

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Preface Joanna Tait

This report is being published in the first few months of the 'New Labour' government, which has come to power with the largest number of women MPs in the history of the UK Parliament. Their modernising agenda and a range of other developments are contributing to a climate and a practical scenario where women are becoming much more visible in numbers, in status, in seniority as leaders, and in their contribution to the life of the country. It is therefore a good time to publish the very first piece of research into women principals/chief executives of FE colleges, and it is a privilege to be invited to write this preface.

FEDA, through its predecessor the Further Education Staff College (FESC), recognised as far back as 1984 that it should be taking steps to address Equal Opportunities in its work. By then, of course, some progress had been made beyond the dim days of the early 1970s, when I first attended a course at Coombe Lodge as a young upstart in her mid-twenties – then there was on average no more than one woman on any FESC course. When women were surveyed in the mid-80s about FESC activities, the views were still that the whole organisation was very male oriented, including basic personal facilities for women.

As college incorporation loomed, however, FESC introduced many changes, and opened its doors to middle managers – and in they came – lots of women doing key jobs in further education. This in turn led to a special international conference in Vienna organised through FESC, and a subsequent conference at Blagdon which brought together a large group of women FE managers, from principals to heads of department. From this grew the National Network for Women Managers in Further and Continuing Education, in 1993. This Network has continued to flourish since then, and our thanks are extended to Keith Scribbins and his colleagues (at the then FESC) for their support in this.

FEDA has since continued to hold an annual event for women managers, and to conduct initial research in this field. This is the first publication, and it is to be hoped by no means the last. There is a significant gap in basic data on women staff in colleges, despite the fact that they are in the majority, as of course are women students across the sector. An example of how difficult it can be to get essential data occurred in 1994–95, when the Network for Women Managers asked the FEFC for up-to-date information on the number of women principals in the FE sector. They could produce a list of all principals, but not by gender. So there is still some way to go.

The nature of the research in this report has been to provide a limited amount of hard data, and to focus primarily on the personal and professional backgrounds, attitudes and experiences of women principals. This will be read with great interest by current women principals and other FE women managers. Part of the loneliness of the aspiring woman in FE is that there are not enough opportunities to hear from and share with other women who have achieved promotion. Most women managers will identify with some if not many of the findings in this report, and will be reassured that there are others with similar experiences. It always helps, in coping better with new situations, to know that others have worked through similar problems and experiences.

The report flags up neatly that there is a research gap so far as male principals/chief executives are concerned. There is a research project to do. Comparisons could be interesting.

This report is an important first step to outline what sort of women become principals, how they think, feel and do. It suggests and makes the reader think of many research avenues to pursue with women managers and staff at other levels. The report does not consider what happens to women principals who are 'sacked' and scapegoated. This is an important area requiring research – for women and men. Equally a mirror piece of research on how women principals are perceived by their staff and their corporation would be worthy of consideration.

To those who read this report and find it useful: think about how you can contribute to this developing area of research. FEDA is developing a positive strategy for research – people with ideas and who wish to contribute are essential if the strategy is to become real.

Joanna Tait
Principal/Chief Executive, Bishop Auckland College
Vice-Chair, National Network for Women Managers
in Further and Continuing Education

Introduction

Statistical evidence supports the fact that further education is a sector in which women are over-represented, both as students and as staff. When, however, we look at the number of women principals of FE colleges, the picture is very different. A recent survey of 22 colleges conducted by the Network of Women Managers revealed that, within this small sample, females represent 83% of the student body, 58% of all employees, 38% of all middle managers, 31% of all senior managers and 27% of all principals. The proportion of women principals throughout the FE sector is even lower – just over 17% at the time of our survey.

That picture is changing. In 1990, there were 13 female principals of FE colleges in England. When we started this project in the spring of 1996, there were 63 female principals. Only a few months later, there were 68. By the Autumn term of 1997, 81 women were principals of further education colleges.

This research arose from FEDA's annual conference for senior women managers in October 1995. At this event, participants showed significant interest in a joint presentation on their career paths by two women principals – one very recently appointed and one of very long standing. Their ideas sparked the conference leaders' consideration of the value of further research into this area, and subsequently our proposal for this project.

In conducting this research we sought to gather information in relation to a series of questions about women principals. We wanted to know:

- who they are and what makes them special
- how they reached principalship
- whether there were characteristic features and patterns to their careers.

We also wanted to find out more about the nature of principalship, to inform the career decisions of other women who aspire to this senior role, and to help them plan more effectively for career development and promotion.

Some previous research has focussed on the career patterns and experiences of women managers in other sectors. These included: *Dancing on the Ceiling: A study of women managers in education* by Valerie Hall, focusing on school head teachers; and *Creative Career Paths in the NHS: Top managers*, by IHSM consultants for the NHS Women's Unit. However, very little research has been conducted on careers at a senior level in the further education sector. Both current management theory and practical evidence in the sector suggest that:

- careers are becoming less certain as the traditional career 'ladders' disappear and structures become flatter
- the experience of being a principal in FE is changing rapidly in response to changes in the structure and nature of the sector.

This report charts the influences on the careers of women principals and identifies the strategies they use to manage their work. It also seeks to determine whether there is evidence of barriers to women's career development in the sector. The work is intended to support the development of appropriate leadership and management development programmes, contribute to research on gender issues and add to the body of knowledge about the FE sector as a whole.

While this book is not a comparative study of the careers of male and female principals, in writing it we were conscious of a need in certain instances for contrasting data for male principals. Unfortunately, such data proved not to be available from the FEFC or other likely sources.

Key points

- Our findings are compatible with research on women high-flyers in other sectors, particularly with reference to childhood experiences, family influences, and the concept of 'career centrality'.
- Common core values include people, teams, honesty and openness.
- Women principals are good at self-management, but typically drive themselves too hard.
- They have not as a rule planned their careers over the long term; however, recent career moves have more commonly been planned.
- They are motivated by new, challenging work and self-development, rather than by promotion or status.
- All acknowledge that being a principal in further education is a hugely demanding role.

We hope that you will find this report stimulating and useful as it stands. We believe that it might also provide the basis for complementary research on male principals' career paths, to enable some interesting comparisons to be made between the experiences of men and those of women at this level.

Acknowledgements

Our thanks to all of the women principals of further education colleges in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, for their help in taking this work forward, whether they responded to our questionnaire or took part in our one-to-one interviews.

Because we recognise the need to preserve the confidentiality of their responses, we are not able to name them, but we greatly appreciate their honesty and generosity in giving their time, when they are clearly working under so much pressure.

Clare Stott
August 1997

Chapter 1

The research project

The project set out to:

- gather information on the careers of women principals in further education colleges in the UK
- identify personal characteristics and external factors which influence female career progression towards senior posts in FE
- analyse the project's quantitative and qualitative findings
- make recommendations for further research in this area.

It was carried out in three stages:

- a literature search of relevant publications and journal articles to identify the main findings of recent research on the careers of senior women managers
- a questionnaire (see Appendix 1) to all 68 women principals in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland
- structured interviews (see Appendix 2) with a sample of 12 women principals, representing:
  - colleges with small, medium and large financial turnover
  - sixth form colleges and general FE colleges
  - newly-appointed and 'long-standing' principals.

Senior women: recent research findings

Our literature search and review of relevant, recent journal articles and books on senior women's careers confirms that there has been relatively little education-specific research of this kind, and little more research into senior women's careers generally. Nevertheless, it is clear that findings on senior women in other fields, in both the public and private sectors, are broadly very similar to our findings regarding women principals in further education.

Some recurrent themes emerge from the research of others, which will be examined in more detail. These include:

- senior women's family influences and childhood
- senior women's personal circumstances
- career planning (or lack thereof)
- perceived barriers to career progression
- perceived strategies for success (their own, and their advice to others)
- risk factors for senior women.

Personal data

White, Cox and Cooper (1992) in particular, and others such as Marshall (1984), examined the influence of childhood and family on the subsequent careers of senior women. They found that senior women often develop an early sense of independence and self-sufficiency. In White, Cox and Cooper's sample of 48 women, 54% were oldest or only children, and more than 70% described their father as the most influential parent, with whom they reported a closer relationship. It is likely that they modelled themselves on male norms of achievement. Those who reported their mothers as most influential (26%) described their mothers as having strong, driven, energetic personalities. Other influences on these women

included: parents who were ambitious for them, the positive role model of a working mother, and growing up with the belief that women 'can do anything'.

The White, Cox and Cooper sample group provided hard data on senior women's personal circumstances. At the time of their study, 58% were married, 50% had children, and 95% reported a supportive partner. In the NHS Women's Unit survey of 563 men and women in top management posts, (IHSM Consultants 1994) 16% of the sample were women. Of these women, 23% were single (contrast 2% of men), and 50% had no children (contrast 7% of men).

Career 'concept'

Senior women were asked to comment on their career plans, or lack of them. Very few of Marshall's sample of 30 senior women from a cross-section of sectors had had a plan. Similarly Davidson and Cooper (1992) found that 50% of their sample had never set themselves a career plan, although more do so now. White, Cox and Cooper reported that 31% of their sample had not planned their careers at all, and 44% felt that their career planning could have been better. Wilde (1994) found that only one women in six of her sample group had a conscious career plan. In the NHS Women's Unit work, respondents were asked to comment on their next career step. Women respondents typically responded 'don't know' first! Lack of career plan evidently prevails for many.

These findings link with discussion in much of the literature (White, Cox and Cooper, Ouston 1993, Marshall and others) surrounding the idea of career 'concept': the indication is that men and women hold different career concepts. Women seem to rate the desire for challenge, self-development, satisfaction and self-fulfilment more highly than their desire for promotion. If this is so, a career plan for women is less relevant. In much of the literature (Wilde, Ruijs 1993, NAHAT Report 1992), women report that they have low aspirations and self-confidence, and at times undervalue themselves and their skills. This, too, is likely to impact on the motivation

and confidence to plan their careers. Women often talk in terms of 'seeing what develops' or 'making the most of what happens', rather than actively managing their careers (Marshall).

By contrast, White, Cox and Cooper, in particular, make much of the very high 'career centrality' of senior women. By this they mean that female high-flyers have a very strong drive to achieve: 80% of their sample indicated that work took priority over family commitments. This correlated, too, with a strong sense of locus of control, that is a belief that the individual has the ability to influence the environment and her personal destiny, and thus her career. Many successful women spoke of their tenacity and perseverance, and this correlates with locus of control, and the pursuit of achievement. Only 15% of the White, Cox and Cooper sample described themselves as lucky in their careers; by contrast 54% attributed their success to hard work, tenacity and determination. All recognised the need to 'actively sell themselves' and make others aware of their contribution: 'just working hard isn't enough'.

How to succeed

In research of this kind with successful women, individuals are often asked to offer insight and guidance into what has enabled them to be successful, and what might assist other women seeking career progression. What follows is drawn from a wide range of sources from the bibliography.

- There is an overwhelming acknowledgement of the benefit of mentors to one's career. For example, 89% of the White, Cox and Cooper group had had a mentor, although in no case was this as part of any formal mentoring programme.
- Successful women urged other women to believe in themselves and 'sell' themselves, get noticed and build credibility. Be persistent and confident. Gain appropriate qualifications.
- It was acknowledged that women are still perceived (and perceive themselves) to be deficient in some skill areas, such as finance. Wide experience was felt to be advantageous.

- Although they believe they have not done enough of it themselves, senior women advocate career planning as beneficial. They point to the need to focus on the future, not wait for things to happen.

Values

Much of the existing research asks senior women to comment on their values and beliefs, or the guiding principles which they bring to their work. Senior women tend to value relationships, openness, co-operation and honesty.

Barriers

Women report that they have encountered barriers en route to senior positions, including institutional and individual discrimination. Prejudicial attitudes toward the 'path' taken to reach a senior role reflects the different career concepts of men and women. However, they acknowledge that perhaps the biggest risk factor is themselves. Successful women set themselves high performance standards; Marshall (1995) and Davidson and Cooper, found that their biggest issue was the risk of overload and the stress of having too much to do, conflicting demands and a constant need to balance priorities.

All of these findings correlate closely with our own.

Our survey of women principals

At the time the questionnaire was distributed, 63 women were principals of FE colleges in England, and five in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Questionnaires were distributed to all of these women principals. Fifty-two of them completed and returned the questionnaire, an excellent response rate of 76%. Many principals commented that they rarely fill in questionnaires of this kind, and were doing so on this occasion because they felt particularly committed to the subject of the research.

Distribution of women principals

By region

Some regions seem to have produced more female principals. Detailed analysis of the reasons is beyond the scope of this study, but factors that bear investigation may include the presence of strong equal opportunities policies and their implementation, and regional cultures of positive discrimination. Most women principals work in Greater London and the southeast (together 38%), with a further concentration (16%) in the northwest. The remainder are fairly evenly distributed among regions. Table 1 (below) shows the numeric distribution of women principals by region and by type of institution.

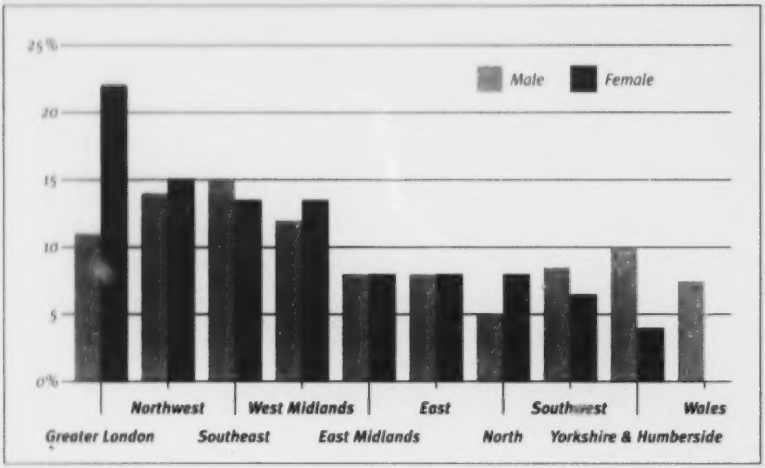
Table 1 Women principals by region and type of college

FEFC		College type					
Region	**Total**	**General**	**Desig'd**	**Tertiary**	**VI form**	**Art&Des**	**Agriculture**
E Midlands	5	5					
Eastern	5	3		1	1		
Grt London	16	10	3	1	2		
Northern	6	2		1	2		1
Northwest	11	4		2	5		
Southeast	10	4	1		4	1	
Southwest	5	3		2			
W Midlands	8	7			1		
Yorks/ Humberside	3	1			2		
Total	69	39	4	7	17	1	1

(Information courtesy of the Network of Women Managers)

These figures, based on the total of 69 women principals at the time of the Network of Women Managers' survey, are further broken down in Figures 1 and 2. Figure 1 charts the distribution of female and male principals by region, based on percentages of female principals and of male principals.

Figure 1 Female and male principals by region
(Information on colleges from FEFC College Directory, July 1996)



By type of institution

Most women principals (a total of 46) work in general FE or tertiary colleges. However, an analysis of the proportion of women principals by type of institution reveals that this figure represents only about 17%. While the numbers are small, women make up nearly 29% of principals of designated colleges and more than 22% of colleges of art and design. Only one woman is principal of an agriculture college. Figure 2 charts the distribution of woman principals against overall numbers of colleges in England by type of institution.

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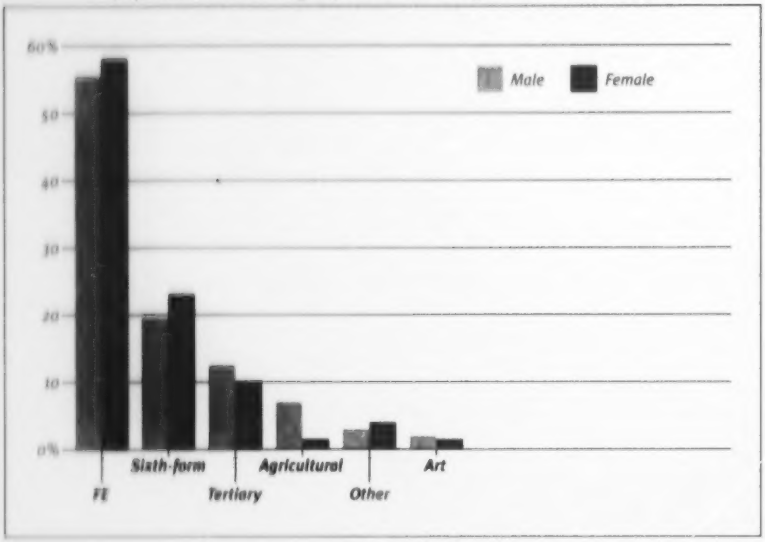
Figure 2 Women principals by type of institution

(Information on colleges from FEFC College Directory, July 1996)

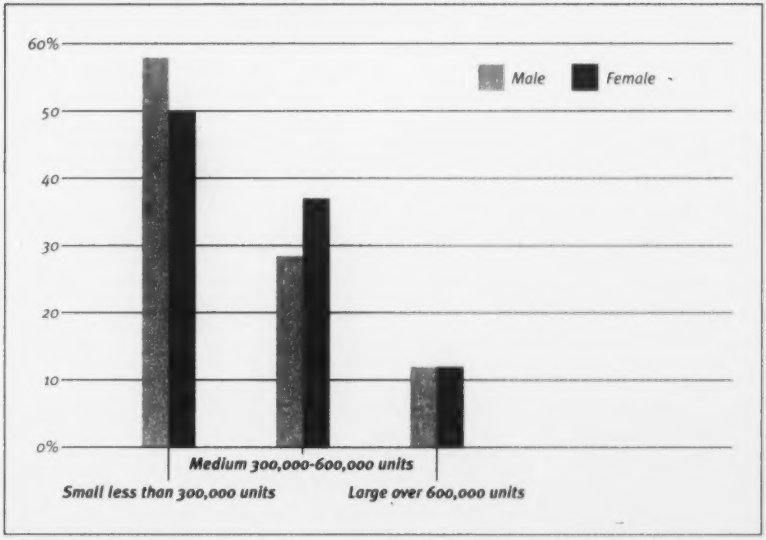


By size of college

The questionnaire asked respondents to state the approximate annual turnover of their college. The information was then put into four bands: £5 million or less; £6–10 million; £11–15 million; and £16+ million.

Replies showed that female principals are managing colleges across the full range of turnover. The larger number of 'small' turnover colleges managed by women is in line with the overall number of small turnover colleges in England. Figure 3 compares the percentage of male and female principals by the size of college grants. However, proportionally fewer women manage the high turnover colleges, represented in the top band.

Figure 3 Women principals by size of college grant



By length of time in post

Respondents were also asked how long they had been in their present post of principal, within the following five categories: less than a year; 1–3 years; 4–6 years; 7–10 years; and 11+ years.

The following chart (Figure 4) illustrates their responses, showing a fairly even distribution between principals appointed in the four most recent time periods. Significantly, 20% of respondents were appointed within the last year. This seems to indicate that women principals' 'market share' is increasing fairly rapidly. The number of appointments made in this one year almost equals those in the 7–10 year band. (Of course, the current post is not necessarily the first principal post for all respondents.)

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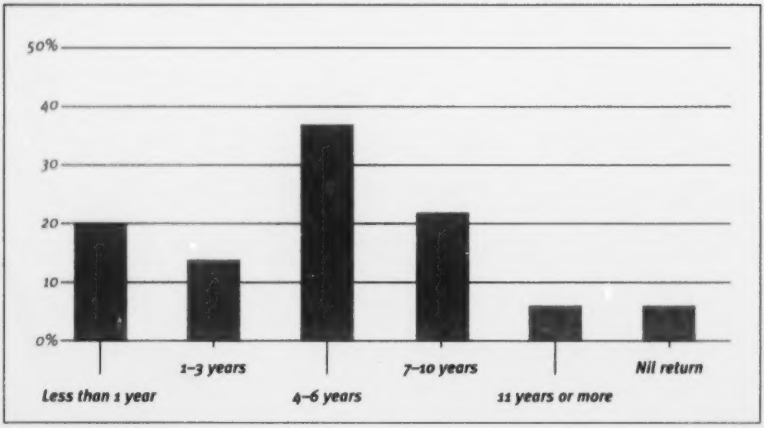
Figure 4 Women principals by length of time in current post



Job flexibility

Principals were asked about job flexibility, including their experience of:

- part-time work
- job share
- secondment
- 'acting' in a more senior role
- lateral moves to broaden experience, or as a result of reorganisation
- working overseas.

A significant proportion of women principals (32%) have worked part time in education, typically early in their careers. Job sharing was relatively rare (5%).

A larger proportion of principals have been seconded at some stage of their career, 36% within education and 19% in other fields. More than half of respondents (55%) have held an acting post. These findings would appear to confirm those in other sectors: high-flyers actively seek out experiences which broaden their skills, and these experiences subsequently help them to gain promotion.

Fewer than one-third of women principals have made lateral moves: 17% deliberately moved 'sideways' to gain experience, and 12% were moved as a result of reorganisation.

Nearly a third worked abroad at some stage in their career; more than two-thirds travelled overseas in the course of their work. Only 7% have ever been made redundant during their career.

Personal data

Not all respondents to the questionnaire answered every question. We have included the rate of nil return on the following individual questions to avoid giving misleading statistics.

Age

Nearly all women principals are over 40. Nearly half are over 50. The age profile of the principals who responded to this question is set out below in Table 2.

Table 2	Age range of women principals
31-35 years	2%
36-40 years	2%
41-45 years	20%
46-50 years	28%
51+ years	48%
(Nil return	4%)

Family

Nearly three-quarters of respondents who answered the question on marital status live with a partner (73%); 23% are separated or divorced and 4% are single. There was a nil return of 8% on this question.

The questionnaire asked principals whether they have children and, if so, at what age they had their first child. A 15% nil return on this question makes the findings less reliable than we would have liked. Of those who answered, 73% have children; 8% had their first child before age 21, 71% between 21 and 30 years old, 18% between 31 and 40, and 3% when they were over 40.

All respondents reported their ethnic origin as white and none were registered disabled.

Chapter 2

A profile of women principals

Don't assume that there is a blueprint of a good principal. You can be your own person – it's just that you have to convince others that their image may need some modification.

Personal qualities

The twelve principals who were interviewed were asked which five words someone who knew them well might use to describe their personality. Six use adjectives such as 'tough', 'direct' or 'firm', four say that they are considered 'fair' or 'constructive', four describe themselves as 'open' and three include the words 'approachable', 'friendly' or 'warm'. Other adjectives and descriptive phrases mentioned are 'arrogant', 'ruthless, 'desire to cut the crap', 'dislike posturing' and 'not as subtle as I ought to be'.

The questionnaire asked principals to describe the personal qualities or other factors which they believe enabled them to achieve principalship. The following are representative answers:

Sometimes being a workaholic and a bit of a perfectionist.

Not believing in my own press releases!

Believing I could make it.

A wide network of professional and personal contacts and support.

Many respondents (40%) list determination, enthusiasm and stamina, and many report that their interpersonal skills and their liking for people were important to their success. A capacity for hard work, a sense of humour, intelligence and the capacity to think quickly and strategically are seen as important factors by about 20% of respondents. A similar proportion identify a commitment to education as important to their achievement. A few highlight their willingness to take risks, good communication/presentation skills and the ability to motivate people as particularly significant. Many respondents refer to qualities such as honesty and integrity, and their ability to 'get things done'. Two principals comment on their strong belief in themselves and the fact that they could 'make it' if they wanted to. In contrast, three women specifically mention that they were in the right place at the right time and seized opportunities as they arose.

One principal attributes her success to:

. . . hard work, a sense of service and the feeling that I can do it as well as anyone else.

Another cites:

. . . good health, optimism, a sense of humour and an acceptance of myself, warts and all, linked to a very clear knowledge of myself.

One woman comments that her tenacity, resilience and sense of humour have enabled her to:

work very hard for many years at my demanding job whilst also bringing up two children and being a committed wife and mother.

Management style

I like to think I act fairly and humanely and am flexible enough to listen and learn from colleagues when they know better than I do.

Integrity at all costs!

I took teaching and support staff through new contracts in two staff meetings personally. We managed to laugh in those meetings. All signed.

During the interviews, we asked principals how their staff might describe their management style. Without exception, every women principal we spoke with believes that her staff would describe her as 'open' or 'approachable' or both. They describe their style as 'participative' and 'consultative', or say they are 'interested in people', 'caring' or 'fair'. Other qualities mentioned are vision, enthusiasm, drive, hard work and ability.

One principal believes her staff might describe her either as 'creative, brave, hard worker, approachable, clever and firm' or as 'wilful, tough, cold and argumentative'. Another reports:

I was dropped in it before incorporation, inspection and a new senior management team . . . I've had to be autocratic.

A few see themselves as hard taskmasters. One admits:

I am never satisfied, I give staff insufficient credit for what they do and am always pushing for improvements.

Internal politics

The only way to beat the system that I have found, in what is still a male-dominated profession (FE senior management), is to consistently deliver what you promise rather than talk about doing so to little tangible effect.

Principals who were interviewed were also asked how someone who knew them well would describe their approach to dealing with the internal politics of the organisations they had worked for. All say they try to be as open as possible with staff and to listen to their points of view. They believe they take care to understand internal relationships and networks, to recognise and deal openly and sensitively with any internal politics and to avoid emasculating critics and internal opposition. One principal believes in 'intelligent intimacy'. She invites all new staff to a principal's tea party to explain her personal style. She feels that this helps reduce the possibilities of staff subsequently laying on her their 'baggage' about powerful females.

One principal stresses the importance of 'talking quietly with people when relationships are not working' and 'taking care not to push people into taking stands'. However, another relishes confrontation and challenge. A few principals try to minimise internal politics, for example by introducing clear and consistent policies and systems for contentious areas of decision-making such as promotion and budget allocation.

Several principals try to sustain a similar openness in their relations with governors and comment on the importance of keeping governors informed, paying them due deference, respecting their role and recognising their power. However, one principal somewhat irreverently admits:

I am totally devious, I try to build relationships with individual governors and pick them off . . . I manipulate them behind the scenes.

Guiding principles

What drives me, I think, is a belief in creating a college where learners get a superb deal, because education and empowering people matter. I think that unless you are motivated by some ideal you won't cope with the stress.

The questionnaire posed the open question, 'what are the guiding principles and belief systems that affect the way you manage your college?' This gave us the opportunity to analyse management styles over a much larger sample. Most respondents gave detailed answers which embrace several themes. Their answers are discussed below in a number of broad categories.

'The new FE'

Everyone works better when they feel valued and motivated.

. . . team working and shared decision-making

This category drew the most frequent comments from respondents. Women principals enjoy working co-operatively as part of teams and try to encourage a spirit of mutual respect, participation and ownership in the college. One principal refers explicitly to recruitment practice, reporting that through the college statement about its culture, her college has succeeded in recruiting energetic and self-motivated people who really value working with others.

Some principals like to think of themselves as facilitating development in a collaborative way rather than by 'going it alone at the top.' This is managed through flatter management structures and the allocation of individual responsibility. One principal tries always to act fairly and humanely in her management role and remains:

flexible enough to listen and learn from colleagues when they know better than I do.

Others are committed to the general principles of open management, collaboration, the generation of innovative ideas and risk-taking.

Many principals believe in strong directional leadership which defines the shape, but not the detail, of college business within mutually-agreed frameworks and targets, empowering both individuals and teams. One woman comments:

I believe that a large part of management is the enabling of others to do their jobs. Although there are leadership skills, I do not subscribe to the concept of an absolute leader.

Clear communication channels, high expectations, example-setting, inspiration and trust are all seen as vitally important.

'Students come first'

Many respondents highlight their commitment to improving learners' possibilities in life through high quality education. One writes:

Education matters – it makes a difference. There's nothing that clever people working hard can't do!

Several principals comment on their desire to release potential in their learners. One woman holds a determined belief that people are not lazy and idle:

If they appear that way it's because you have put them in that position.

However, some comment that there is a growing mismatch between the business side of FE and the best interests of the individual student. As one woman puts it:

My guiding belief is that both staff and students have tremendous potential which can remain untapped. Students must not be seen as products, even though FE is now a business.

'Accountability, honesty, integrity'

Twelve principals specifically emphasise the importance they place on honesty, accountability, transparency, fair practice, openness of information and sharing of decision-making, and integrity.

'Equality of opportunity and empowerment'

Several principals cite equality of opportunity as one of the main principles which shapes the way they manage their organisation. They see access to education as a basic human right and believe that it should be designed to match different needs and abilities and be available without barriers. This view resonates strongly with outcomes of the recent Tomlinson Report, *Inclusive Learning* (1996). One principal comments that she is driven by a desire to improve opportunities for the disadvantaged. Another gave her core values as 'respect for people and belief in equal opportunities.' Interestingly, only two principals refer directly to the importance of feminism and socialism as a part of their belief system.

'Commitment to community'

Many women principals see commitment to the local community as highly important. Again, respondents experience difficulties in reconciling the principle of service to the community with the new competitive face of the sector and the need for colleges to be financially viable.

'Commitment to staff'

Commitment to staff is seen as vital because 'a college is only as good as the staff that work in it.' Several principals express a commitment to improving staff conditions. Two principals write specifically about valuing all staff, both teaching and non-teaching.

'Reflective manager'

A number of principals refer either to their religious belief or to their psychotherapy, describing it as the key which enables them to be reflective about their own practice as managers. One comments:

> *It's important to be aware of who you are and to have the capacity to reflect on your own learning and put it into practice.*

Staff development

Three principals describe staff development as a guiding principle in their management practice. One likes to 'grow' managers:

> *It is important to have a management team who know as much as I do. I like people to share ideas and common objectives and I will then accept that my own ideas are wrong if they are very different from those of other members of my team. I believe in sharing tasks, giving others as much responsibility as I can and helping them to develop themselves.*

The job

Every decision you take to do something means you can't do something else or can't do it as well. Decide what price you are prepared to pay for what you want (there is always a price). Realise that senior posts carry with them the responsibility to have to face unpleasant decisions and do nasty things.

The new FE

Many of the principles and beliefs that women principals espouse are contrasted with the realities of further education post-incorporation. In their position at the forefront of the transformation of colleges into businesses, principals are well acquainted with the tensions and conflicts arising from this sea change in goals and values. Many women are trying to reconcile the principle of 'service' with the business requirements of modern FE. Some find that conflicts of interest during the last few years have made it more difficult to maintain the principles of integrity and openness which are their core values. One principal comments that she has tried to share these values within the organisation and build teams based upon them, whatever the difficulties.

Some women indicate a frustration with the administrative requirements of the post-incorporation college. One principal admits that she gets irritated by bureaucracy and systems:

I spent my formative years in adult education and got used to being able to create the curriculum rather than conform to systems created by outside bodies.

Two principals acknowledge the need for staff to understand the new arrangements, but try as far as possible to protect their teaching and support staff from being overburdened by management worries.

Workload

Be prepared to work extremely hard, consistently month after month, year after year. Don't take on the job unless you are prepared to do this.

The questionnaire asked principals how many hours they work, on average, per week. Responses showed that 10% work between 40 and 50 hours a week, 44% between 50 and 60 hours, and 46% over 60 hours. The average principal spends between one and two hours working before 9.00 am, and five hours or more after 5.00 pm and at weekends. While 39% of respondents worked the same number of hours in their previous job, 49% believe they now work longer hours, and only 12% think they now work less. On average, 60 to 80% of working time is spent in college and 10 to 20% is spent working at home or elsewhere in education.

Principals' questionnaire responses indicate that there are many other duties, both work-related and non-work-related, which occupy their time in addition to their main duties. A third of respondents spend between one and five hours per week on reading and study related to work, 40% have additional lecturing or public speaking engagements, and 29% spend between one and five hours per week writing for publication.

Of the women who replied to this question, 40% have childcare responsibilities, 55% look after other members of the family and 35% spend from six to ten hours per week on other domestic duties.

In addition, our respondents undertake a wide range of voluntary work and public duties. These include membership of school or university governing bodies, membership of national training or education committees, support for local charities or other voluntary organisations. Involvement typically ranges from one to four hours a week.

Health issues

The questionnaire asked for the average number of days sick leave principals take per year. The vast majority of women principals take very little or no sick leave: 35% take no sick leave at all, 56% take one to three days, 6% four to six days. Only two respondents have taken more than ten days.

The capacity to cope with stress and a high level of physical stamina are recognised as important. However, a number of the principals who were interviewed have stress-related physical problems. They feel they should pay more attention to reducing stress, but tend not to take time off work when ill. One principal commented that women tend to think they need to prove themselves and are reluctant to risk being seen as someone who cannot cope. Another believes that women tend to put themselves under considerable stress when they feel the need to be seen to 'out-macho' the men. Three of the principals interviewed find the present stress levels unacceptable and plan to leave further education within the next few years.

A recent research report into lecturers' workload and factors affecting stress levels for NATFHE by NFER (Earley 1994) found no significant differences in the experience of stress across a number of variables including gender. The survey found, however, that the factors causing greatest stress in FE were:

- 'changes in conditions of service'
- 'new styles of institutional management'.

Doubtless the role of principal – the driving force behind these changes – is equally subject to stress caused by these factors. Research conducted by Fotinatos and Cooper (1993) and Gallie and White (1993) found higher levels of stress amongst professionals and managers. Certainly our respondents made numerous references to the stress and huge demands of the role of principal. One principal advises other aspiring women to:

> *. . . examine your ability to cope with stress; the more senior the more stress – honestly!*

Strategies for self-management

Red wine, two dogs and child!

Know when to turn off and have a drink!

Recognise when I am tired and stop!

Asking for help. Making lists. Concept of 'good enough'!

Look for fun and comradeship whenever it can be found!

Nothing is worth doing after 10 pm!

The questionnaire asked whether the principals had any particular strategies for managing themselves and their workload. Respondents have a variety of strategies: 30% of them emphasise the importance of taking time out from work by keeping Friday nights and Saturdays free and/or taking good holidays. A few note the importance of a sense of humour and a sense of proportion about work, including the need for laughter and fun during the working day. Some comment on the role of personal fitness in relation to management of self-and work. To quote one principal:

I take care of myself – fitness, flowers, treats; I work intensively and then take proper breaks.

Time-management skills, paper-handling skills, the support of a good personal assistant and the ability to prioritise, delegate and ask for help are all considered important strategies for managing a principal's workload. A few principals endorse separating 'people-time' from 'paper-time':

I make as much time as possible during the day for people – I work on papers early in the morning, in the evening and at weekends.

A number of respondents attach particular importance to effective planning. One woman describes her day like this:

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I clear my desk of routine matters every day and attend to strategic planning later in the day. I do self-hypnosis and relaxation exercises every evening and physical exercises before a peaceful breakfast each morning.

Seven of the principals, however, feel that they are not very good at managing themselves or their work, putting themselves under undue stress as a result. They criticise themselves for not thinking sufficiently strategically, not delegating enough, and for being too much of a perfectionist or a workaholic.

The stress level is very high . . . the job is swallowed up in bureaucracy.

I find it hard to manage myself and the workload.

Balancing career and home

Work has the central role in my life . . . [I] get absorbed by it and find it difficult to stop.

My career, as opposed to the post, is an integral part of me.

Principals who were interviewed were asked where their career fits in terms of its priority in their life. For half of the sample of principals interviewed, their career is of central importance. Although 25% say that their children are more important than their career, two-thirds of these think that their career has grown more important since their children have left home. A few principals comment directly on the relationship between their sense of self and their career. To quote one principal:

I don't see myself as a workaholic. I believe in education as a force to shape society and therefore I don't really separate my personal from my professional values.

While some principals think their career and family are equally balanced, and value highly the support they receive from their partners, others are less happy about the balance between work and other aspects of their life. One principal reports, for example, that she has no hobbies and is concerned that she does not give enough time to her husband and daughter. Another, who was appointed recently, wants to achieve more of a balance between her personal life and her career:

> *My relationship with my partner is very important to me and while we do book time to spend together, these times seem rather like an oasis in the desert. I am also losing sight of my relationship with myself at present. This is something I am unhappy about.*

Chapter 3

Career patterns of women principals

I never intended to become a principal. I only applied for the post because I couldn't have worked under one of the other candidates had he got the job! I didn't expect to get it . . .

I didn't make a single career choice until I was 40! However I was very good at responding positively to opportunities as they arose.

I have responded to opportunities and encouragement, rather than sought out progression and possibilities.

I have never had a long or short-term plan. I have responded to opportunities as they arose. I knew I wanted to be a teacher . . . subsequent developments moved from each other rather than being part of a plan.

Over the years I applied for promotion when attractive posts came up. There was not an actual career plan. The principalship was almost an accident!

I've always felt too busy to plan. When opportunities arose I seized them.

Opportunities turned up and somehow I recognised them as being appropriate and interesting to me.

The questionnaire asked to what extent the principals' careers were planned: not at all, hardly, at certain stages, or to a considerable extent.

More than half (55%) of women principals believe they planned their career 'at certain stages'; 28% consider they 'hardly' planned it; and 11% think their career has 'not been planned at all'. Only 6% think they planned their careers 'to a considerable extent'. While a few principals intended to become teachers, none planned from an early stage in their career to become a principal. A number of principals started to plan their careers when their children were in their late teens or after a divorce. One comments:

I didn't decide to be a principal until appointed as a vice-principal but then I was sure.

Another says:

When I have reached a particular position I have sometimes given myself a timescale of three to five years to reach the next level, but I never aspired to being a principal when I was a lecturer.

Many principals applied successfully for a series of posts, either because they believed the new post would be interesting, or because thought they could do the relevant job. In some cases they felt intuitively 'that's me' and decided to apply. Most report that they have responded to opportunities as they arose. One principal admits:

The only thing I have ever planned was having my daughter . . . otherwise I just seized opportunities as they presented themselves.

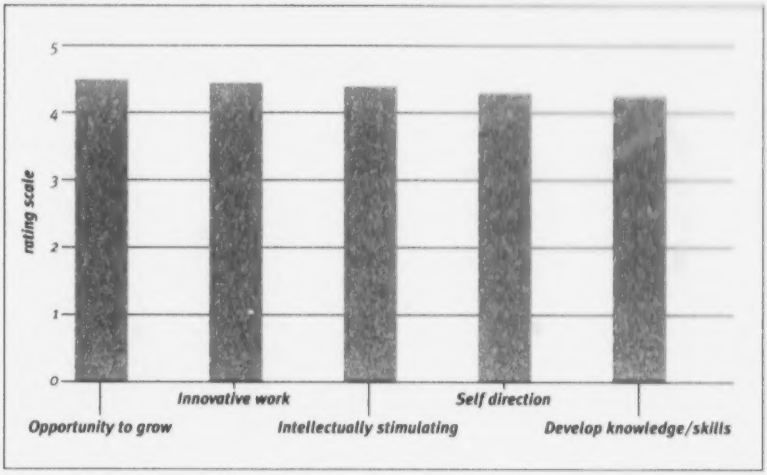
A number of respondents say they applied for new jobs because they were restless, easily bored or eager for opportunities to do something new.

Career motivators

The desk research conducted at the beginning of this work indicated that women's 'career concept' differs from that of men. We asked the principals to rate, on a scale of 1–5, the most and least important influences on their career. They were given a choice of 20 variables with the opportunity to nominate 'other' influences. The results, illustrated in Figures 5a and 5b, clearly support the findings from elsewhere.

Women principals are most likely to have made career decisions and moves on the basis of the opportunity to 'grow' and undertake innovative, intellectually stretching work in a new role, which gives them the opportunity for self-direction and to develop their knowledge and skills.

Figure 5a Five most important influences on career choice



Least influential factors (see Figure 5b) are the desire to reduce stress, or to undertake flexible work that fits in with family commitments. Nor do this group seem to be influenced by the desire for job security or promotion opportunity.

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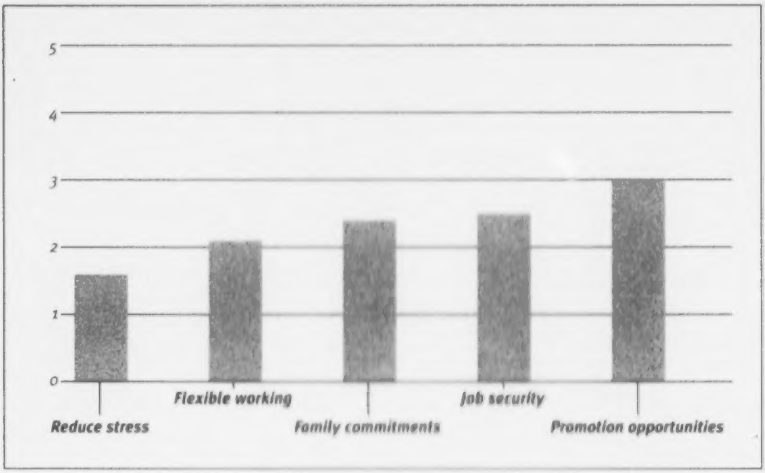
Figure 5b Five least important influences on career choice



Our findings, then, correlate with those of White, Cox and Cooper, Marshall and others: women are more motivated by new, challenging work and self-development, than by promotion or status. Hence, these women may have less clearly-defined career plans, because the content of the role is more important to them than its title or position in the organisation hierarchy. If this is found to be a true gender difference in terms of career planning, it leads to a broader question about the ongoing imbalance between men and women at principal level. Indeed some of our respondents indicate that they attained principalship more by 'accident' than 'design'!

Career paths

Don't be afraid to take risks in career terms. Don't linger using the excuse that the present job isn't completed to avoid risks.

Respondents were asked to submit a career summary or CV with their questionnaires, and 48 of the 52 respondents did so.

Twenty-one of our women principals commenced their careers as school teachers. Their transfer into further education occurred at different career stages, ranging from joining FE as an L1, to joining as a principal having previously been a head teacher.

Only seven have spent their entire career in further education.

The remaining responses suggest that for others the move into FE was a move to teach the subject of their first profession, or a broader career change. Diverse first careers included personnel management, BBC researcher, tax inspector, nurse, systems analyst, immigration officer, and journalist.

Half of our respondents followed a very traditional career path through the further education system, commencing at L1, then L2, then typically Senior Lecturer, Principal Lecturer, Head of Department, School or Faculty, and finally Vice-Principal and Principal. Others had joined partway through this career route, for instance at Senior Lecturer level, and then taken a similar career path. Surprisingly, there are perhaps only one or two examples of non-traditional career paths into principalship for today's group of women principals.

Mobility

Be prepared to move jobs. Not many achieve seniority in their own college.

The questionnaire asked principals how many times during their career they had commuted, spent time away from home, moved home or changed their children's school, either as a result of their own job or their partner's job.

Seventeen principals report that they have spent more than two hours a day travelling to work at some stage in their career, ten have commuted weekly to their job at least once, and six have spent more than a month away from home in connection with work. While eleven respondents have moved home once or twice, nine have moved more than three times. Seven have changed their child's school at least once on account of their job or their partner's.

Influences on career progression

> *. . . a need to demonstrate achievement in particular for my own self-image. Fear of underachievement in myself and others is my main driver.*

As part of the questionnaire, principals were asked whether any significant event, experience or turning point shaped how they see themselves and their abilities. The twelve principals who were interviewed were asked in addition about possible childhood or family influences on their career choice.

Survey responses to this question indicate that a wide range of events helped to formulate respondents' aspirations and confidence levels. The events or influences reflect the personality of the individual principals and include:

- becoming aware that those in more senior posts are not necessarily more capable
- receiving support and encouragement from colleagues
- experiencing life events completely external to education
- taking on more responsibility at work
- having what was perceived as 'a lucky break'
- experiencing barriers and being determined to overcome them
- participating in good staff development.

These categories are described more fully in the following paragraphs.

I can do as well as him – if not better!

Some of the most heartfelt comments in response to this question come from principals who consider that they have been managed by less capable people than themselves. One FEFC inspection nominee realised that she knew more about FE than her principal, and decided to apply for principal posts. Another principal says that two of the most significant influences on her career were:

> *. . . having to carry people more senior than me in their responsibilities, and having a plethora of jobs dumped on me.*

Another declares that her spur to seeking higher-level posts was the experience of being managed by a lazy and incompetent man. Many of these women felt frustrated by the experience of seeing someone at a higher level doing a job inadequately, and knowing they could do as well or better than their manager. One respondent, at the time a vice-principal, had not applied for the principal's post in her own college when it first came up and could therefore take part in selection interviews. The panel was not able to appoint and re-advertised the post. She compared herself to the candidates she had interviewed and took the plunge!

Support from senior colleagues

Several women identify support or encouragement from senior colleagues, such as heads of department, principals and inspectors, as an important factor in their decision to seek promotion.

External events

External events unrelated to education account for 10% of the questionnaire responses to this question. Women cite personal experiences, such as becoming a mother or a foster parent, suffering a spine injury and not knowing whether it would ever heal properly, and 'being an unqualified stay-at-home mother from 20–24.' One woman reports that turning 40 prompted her to:

. . . make time for re-assessment and planning to do some things for myself. This led to a good job and divorce.

Extra responsibility

Many respondents took on extra responsibility either at work or outside work which allowed them to demonstrate their abilities and develop new skills and, above all, increased their self-confidence. Two respondents refer to crises – such as the sudden death of a colleague or a difficult merger with a neighbouring college – which were traumatic, but which eventually led to higher-level jobs.

One woman was surprised and reassured to find in her first management post that:

I could be me and need not conform to anybody else's style of management.

This encouraged her to continue seeking promotion. Three principals refer to new roles outside the college which developed their self-confidence. One respondent unexpectedly became the chair of a hung education committee as a lecturer, never having sat on the committee previously. She had to learn about all aspects of education 'on the hoof'. This developed her ability to learn fast and think quickly. She considers that the experience has since stood her in very good stead in a number of very demanding jobs.

The luck factor

You have to work very hard at things, pick up opportunities when you see them . . .

Just working hard isn't enough.

Our 12 one-to-one interviewees were asked whether they had experienced any 'lucky breaks' in their careers. Eight of the 12 believe they had. Yet, under the surface, these events appear to have been as much the result of the individual's skill as of luck. For example, a few feel particularly lucky to have been promoted from L2 to Head of Department. Some identify acting posts as lucky breaks. Some took on cross-college responsibilities, quickly became valuable experts within the college, and were soon promoted into management roles. Have these women been lucky, therefore, or are they overly modest in taking the credit for their own skills and successes?

The research findings summarised in Chapter One indicate that women high-flyers typically demonstrate a strong focus of control: they have a strong sense of shaping their own achievements, rather than attributing them to 'luck'.

Setbacks at work as learning experiences

Two respondents cite setbacks as the most significant shaping influences on their careers. One describes the need to rebuild perceptions of herself following redundancy from her VP post. The other reports that being passed over for promotion because she was female made her even more determined to succeed.

Childhood and family influences

Questionnaire responses describe how early experiences helped to shape career aspirations. One respondent was urged as a child to try for university by two women managers in industry, on the grounds that if she wanted to achieve in a 'man's world' then she had to be properly trained. Another describes the enormous boost of being accepted unconditionally for the London School of Economics at 17, despite having failed the 11+ at a time when girls were expected to go into shop work if they didn't get the exam. This woman's experience fuelled her conviction as a practitioner and manager that the best educational resources should go to those with the greatest need. For a third principal, being relegated to the B-stream at grammar school was the source of her determination to succeed. Another's

early experience gave her the expectation that she must always 'work hard and be good.' She has since spent years developing the confidence to be herself. One respondent says that the most significant influence on her career was 'running as the Labour candidate in a mock election at school in 1964.' (She doesn't say whether she lost or won.)

The 12 principals who were interviewed were asked specifically whether any aspects of their family experience influenced their career progression. Five of these principals describe themselves as coming from working class families who placed a high value on education. Six were the eldest or only child in the family, one was a second child whose elder sister sadly died in infancy. Three women specifically mention that their parents might have preferred a son. Two others describe a strong belief in equality within the family, noting 'strong humanist values' or parents who were 'committed socialists'. One principal reports:

> *My father would often say that there was nothing a man could do that a woman couldn't do.*

Another describes her father as not differentiating much between gender roles. Two women say that they had had particularly close relationships with their fathers.

Three principals who were interviewed had parents who were teachers: the mother of one was a head teacher by the time the interviewee was 7; another's mother was head of a physics department. Six of the 12 principals say their parents had high expectations and were ambitious for them to succeed, sometimes to take advantage of opportunities the parents had not had. One woman had to be top of every exam every year and was expected to be the first in the family to go to higher education and Oxbridge.

Interviewees who do not specifically describe their parents as ambitious for them to succeed tend to describe their parents as 'not putting obstacles in the way' or 'generally supportive'.

Two principals report that a parent had suffered from illness or died when they were relatively young, and that this forced them to stand on their own feet at an early age.

Professional development

Create time, space and development opportunities for yourself.

You don't get there by 'Buggin's turn' if you are a woman.

Qualifications and support from employers

Principals were asked about their highest qualification and any support they had received from employers to improve their qualifications. Only 79% of survey respondents chose to answer the first question. Thirty-four of these principals have a first degree, thirty-seven achieved an MA, two an MBA, and one an MPhil. Six principals have professional qualifications in specific areas of educational activity (see table 3.) Although they had received paid INSET during their careers, 44% of respondents had received no financial or other support from their employers the process of gaining these qualifications. These findings point to a need within the FE sector for professional development activities linked to qualifications.

During the summer of 1997, FEDA conducted the largest and most comprehensive survey to date regarding management development in FE. More than 4,000 survey questionnaires were returned, 55% from men and 45% from women. Some findings related to comparative differences between men and women:

- When asked how important each of 36 elements of management were in relation to their current job (on a rating scale of 1 to 5), women consistently give a greater degree of importance to these elements of their job than men. This is progressively true as the management tier of respondent decreased.
- Regarding the extent to which respondents felt they could benefit from further development, either now or at the time of their appointment, there is no significant difference in the ratings given by male and female respondents at Chief Executive or second tier levels. At the third tier, however, there are instances of statistically significant differences. Women tend to see less need for development now, but a higher level of

need for development at the time of their appointment. Does this tell us something about the confidence levels of women as they move into management? Perhaps, since they perceive their need for development now to be less, they set about meeting their own identified learning gaps.

- The survey found that 49% of female respondents entered management during the past five years, compared with 32% of male respondents. This reaffirms our awareness that more women are moving into management in FE.
- Perhaps linked to the second point above, the survey found that, with the exception of Chief Executives, female respondents in each tier attached greater importance to the acquisition of a nationally-recognised qualification than men.

Table 3 Women principals' qualifications

Qualification	Number of principals
Professional qualification	14
1st degree	16
1st degree + professional qualification	8
MA/MSc	17
MA + professional qualification	3
MLitt	1
MBA	3
ACSET	1
MEd	1

Time for professional development

Principals were asked how much time they were currently able to devote to their own professional development. The majority (60%) have spent fewer than five days on their own development during the previous twelve months. Only 12% of respondents spent more than ten days on professional development during that period. The most significant professional development experiences appear from the data to have happened before women achieved principalship.

Most significant professional development experience

The questionnaire asked which professional development activities have been the most significant to date. Analysis of responses reveals six broad groups of experience, covering a very wide variety of development activities – from industry secondments to a colour analysis course.

Secondments and work placements, together with management training run by industry, account for the highest number of comments from respondents. Courses or secondments offered by Lever Brothers, Nestlé, IBM, Rank Xerox, Marks & Spencers, and British Aerospace are specifically mentioned. One principal reports:

> *IBM, a local company, spotted me and decided that I was headship material. Someone believed enough in me to tell me and try to help me.*

Another principal commented that a course offered by Rank Xerox was excellent and helped give her serious career aspirations.

Staff College/FEDA programmes emerge as the most significant development experiences for seven principals. The Head of Department courses, the Vice-Principals programme, and the Preparation for Management course were identified as particularly helpful. One principal described the latter as:

> *. . . bringing together aspiring senior managers and giving opportunities for observation, reflection and personal strategic planning.*

Five principals report that seminars and training courses run by management consultants were influential. Tom Peters and Charles Handy are singled out for particular praise. One principal comments that the Tom Peters seminar she attended was 'imaginative and thought provoking, asking daring questions and posing challenges.'

Many principals indicate that participation in committees and other activities at a regional and national level offers opportunities for personal development, change of location and stimulation from a range of different sources. The co-opted member of an education committee describes how the experience helped to hone her political and public speaking skills.

The process of gaining an MBA, MA or diploma was the most significant personal development activity for several women principals.

However, the most glowing descriptions of development experiences come from the four principals who report that counselling, psychotherapy or personal growth programmes were significant in their professional lives. One principal comments that managers:

> *. . . have so much crap projected at them at work these days, an understanding of psycho-dynamics is essential to survival.*

One respondent finds that monthly supervision sessions at the Tavistock Institute are of enormous benefit in withstanding the pressures of principalship, enabling her to 'retain the analytic position when things are at their wildest'.

Other principals mention overseas travel, assertiveness/interpersonal skills training, LEA training, APVIC courses, FEFC seminars, networking and cross-college responsibilities as influential in their development. Only one principal reports that an event specifically for women was the most significant development experience. One principal cites Careertrack tapes for self-development as her best resource, because they are 'private and always available in times of need.' And one principal writes 'colour analysis changed my life'.

Sexism

. . . incredible chauvinism in the early days . . .

During the interviews, the 12 principals were asked whether they had experienced any particular barriers to their career progression. Only one principal in the interview sample feels that she has not experienced any particular barriers to her career progression.

Most of the twelve women principals in our interview sample report encountering significant sexism in their early careers. One principal comments that during her thirties she experienced difficulties in being taken seriously as a woman, but found that these problems eased when she reached her forties. Two principals entered further education after experiencing particular prejudice against women in higher education. Another reports that in her early career she received a deputation from the engineering staff in her college asking her to stand down as a candidate for an L2 post in favour of a male candidate, on the grounds that she was a woman and had a child.

Many women report being asked gender-biased questions by interview panels, for example detailed questioning on discipline issues or their husband's job. A few feel they have failed to secure jobs despite being the best candidate. One received feedback that she was not offered a principal's post because the chairman of governors refused to work with a woman.

Nevertheless, some feel that:

The gender issue has actually worked to my advantage.

Opportunities and barriers

Recognise the strengths of being a woman (rather than reflect on the weaknesses). Be prepared for change (and welcome it as an opportunity).

The principals we interviewed were invited to give their views about the opportunities for, and barriers to, career progression at the present time. In general, the interviewees feel that the growth of equal opportunities has reduced prejudice against women in senior management roles. They celebrate the fact that there are now more female senior managers to provide positive role models for others. One principal observes that urban areas tend to provide greater opportunities for promotion for women, a hypothesis which appears to be substantiated by the relevant statistics.

Some principals perceive that the 'people' skills which tend to be more developed in women are now more highly valued. They suggest that many women are more innovative, flexible and responsive to change than their male counterparts. One principal describes her belief that there are now more opportunities for leaders with highly-developed interpersonal skills and a strong vision which they can share with other people. The sort of people who will be needed in the sector are those:

> *. . . who can network, motivate staff and resolve difficult problems such as downsizing and redundancies.*

In contrast, a significant number of principals observe that governors tend to value financial management skills more highly than interpersonal skills, suggesting a tendency for business experience to count for more than educational experience. As one principal comments,

> *There are currently two ways to achieve promotion – either being a good HR manager, backed up by curriculum experience, or by being a good accountant . . . the softer curriculum pathway to promotion is disappearing and the 'hard' skills are now what count.*

In the words of another:

> *The current FE culture favours the macho-style principal who will be a 'hatchet man' in a downsizing. The present efficiency squeeze is making this tendency worse and governors don't think they need to appoint people who are able to take staff with them.*

The number of principals leaving the sector since incorporation has created more opportunities for promotion. However, flatter management structures have reduced the number of senior posts and the opportunities for women to develop a broad range of management skills. There are fewer opportunities to develop a wider perspective through secondments or appointment to LEA officer or adviser posts. Women principals also note difficulties in networking with agencies such as Chambers of Commerce and TECs, which still tend to be male dominated. To quote one principal,

> *FE is still a very male environment with which women have to come to terms if they want to succeed.*

Looking to the future

Respondents to our questionnaire were asked how they envisage their career developing over the next five years.

Approximately a quarter expect to stay and 'consolidate' in their current role:

> *There is sufficient challenge here for a while.*
>
> *. . . still plenty to achieve here.*

Another quarter genuinely did not know what their future held:

> *My mind is still open!*
>
> *Impossible to say.*
>
> *I simply do not know.*
>
> *I don't plan out my career . . . I do what seems appropriate at the time.*

Others envisage a developmental move to a role outside the FE sector. For some, retirement is in view.

Advice to women aspiring to senior posts in FE

I never intended to become a principal. I only applied for the post because I couldn't have worked under one of the other candidates had he got the job! I didn't expect to get it . . .

One of our underlying objectives in gathering information about the careers of women principals has been to inform the career decisions of other women who aspire to the role, and to help them plan more effectively for career development and promotion.

As well as investigating how (or whether) women principals planned their own careers, the questionnaire asked what they consider to be the key elements of a career plan in further education. Few, if any, of the women in our study set out at the beginning of their careers to become a college principal, or followed a carefully-planned career path with that specific a goal in mind. Nevertheless – and with, perhaps, the benefit of hindsight and considerable experience – they have clear and broad-ranging advice to offer on this subject.

Elements of a career plan

Adaptability and preparedness to embrace change are keys to the future.

Ensure that each new position, whether within the same college or at a different college, provides different opportunities to develop skills and experience.

I think time spent outside education to get a less blinkered view is invaluable.

Many principals emphasise the value of flexibility, willingness to embrace change and the ability to:

. . . keep up to date, recognise opportunities and respond to new developments.

Breadth of experience and appropriate skills were also seen as crucially important. However, about 20% of respondents take the view that it is difficult to devise a career plan given the current rate of change.

A number of principals emphasise the value of cross-college experience:

The biggest step in a career plan is the willingness to move away from subject teaching. If people are not prepared to move away from full commitment to subject teaching to take on cross-college responsibilities, they will not be promoted.

A few principals underline the importance of interpersonal skills and experience of human resource management. One woman comments that 'it's dead easy to manage the bricks – the people are the problem.' About 20% of respondents noted the value of experience outside education, and a similar number mention the importance of higher degrees and management qualifications. A few underline the importance of hard work, the ability to deliver results on time, and the need to work beyond the capacity of each job before moving on. Others mention the important role of career mentors and networking.

There is a strong emphasis on the value of gaining experience in a wide range of management functions. A significant number of principals stress the importance of fully understanding the FEFC funding methodology, and gaining experience of financial and resource management. While one principal highlighted the need to 'balance vision with pragmatism and recognise value for money,' another emphasised the importance of:

. . . being able to do jobs . . . if you speed the promotion process up too fast, there is insufficient opportunity to develop capabilities across the range of college functions from finance to human resources.

Women principals advocate rotating jobs and getting experience of the more difficult areas:

Not enough women are ambitious enough to progress to principal and prefer to stick to the curriculum or community aspects.

'Go for it!'

The questionnaire invited the principals to offer advice to other women in the sector who aspire to senior posts. Their responses to this question are broad-ranging and generous. They are reproduced in full in Appendix 3.

Respondents repeatedly advise women in FE to 'go for it' to 'believe in yourself' and to 'do it your way'. Many emphasise the importance of considering carefully the demands of the job and being clear about the price you are prepared to pay in response to the demands of this senior role. One woman advises:

Be clear what you want, why you want it; be true to yourself and your own style, value and beliefs.

Women aspiring to a principal's post are advised to think very hard about what it will mean for their partners and families, and whether they really want the level of responsibility the post carries. One principal warned,

Recognise the demands it will make on your time, energy and emotions, that it will put a distance between you and your junior colleagues and that there will be many times when the job will have to take priority over family and self.

Many principals emphasise the importance of self-knowledge, self-confidence and belief in one's own ability to succeed. In terms of on-the-job support, women need to identify sources of personal support, such as a mentor and a network of supportive peers. Some women principals highlight the need for women aspiring to senior posts to examine their ability to cope with stress. The advice offered covers a wide variety of concerns:

- *don't get put off by jealousy and back stabbing*
- *harden yourself to the criticism and knocks which are likely to occur*
- *don't have children* (although most *do* have children)
- *dress the part*
- *don't try to be like a man.*

A number of women comment on the importance of hard work and the need to be prepared 'to work harder than most men'. One principal offers this positive advice:

> *Never give up! The glass ceiling does exist, so don't assume your problems are necessarily your own fault. Create time, space and development opportunities for yourself.*

Chapter 4

Conclusions

We sought in this research project to find out more about the FE sector's women principals, how they achieved principalship, and what if anything were the characteristic features of themselves and their careers.

Inevitably, this work has raised more questions about management development for women in FE. Is there a need for women-only management development? As women acquire an increasing proportion of management and indeed, principal posts, what development should we offer to support their career progression? How long will it be before the proportion of women in management and principal posts reflects the number of women in the sector? Key questions for FEDA and perhaps for further research.

We have found that this group are indeed 'special'. We were struck by their generosity of spirit, in responding so fully to our questionnaire, and by the richness of these responses. There is much here from which other women aspiring to principalship can learn.

Our findings on women principals in further education broadly reflect findings from other recent research into women high-flyers. We find some common ground in terms of childhood and family influences. They are a group motivated more by challenge and self-development than by status

or promotion. Women principals demonstrate high 'career centrality', acknowledging that their work has often taken priority over other areas of their life.

Our respondents emphasise common core values around the themes of people, teams, relationships, openness, co-operation and honesty. Their own qualities are many and diverse, but common to all are energy, stamina and drive, enthusiasm, hard work and humour.

Generally women principals are a group who manage themselves well, albeit sometimes pushing themselves too hard. Their careers are typified by increasing confidence and self-awareness. Barriers are turned into challenges. All recognise the benefit of a supportive partner, of respected mentors, and of a broad base of experience.

Like other women high-flyers, few women principals feel that their careers have been planned over the long term, but more recent career moves were more deliberate. Our respondents are all generous in offering advice to others, although many note the need to recognise the huge demands of the role of principal.

Here though, the similarities end. Ultimately, these women are a unique group of individuals who have responded to the challenge of the principalship.

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Appendices

Appendix 1:

Survey questions

[The following sets out in full the questions asked in the survey of women principals. We have, however, condensed its original layout. Ed.]

Please cross (using black ink) all relevant boxes and write longer answers inside the larger boxes. Use continuation sheets if necessary, linking your answers to appropriate questions.
The questionnaire should take about 20 minutes of your time to complete
All responses will be treated as absolutely confidential.

If you feel unable to complete the whole questionnaire, please complete as much as possible.

Q1 Name of college

Q2 Your title

Q3 What is your FEFC region?

Northern	Yorkshire & Humberside
North-West	West Midlands
South-West	East Midlands
South-East	Eastern Region
Greater London	

Q4 Please state the approximate annual turnover of your college.

Q5 Date of appointment

<1 year ago	1-3 years ago	4-6 years ago
7-10 years ago	11+ years ago	

Q6 Please indicate which of the following best describes your college:

FE college	Tertiary college	
Sixth form college	Specialist college –	Agricultural & Horticultural
Designated college	Specialist college –	Art and Design and Performing Arts

Career breaks

We would like to know about factors that influenced the move to your present job.

Q7 Please indicate below any factors that resulted in a career break that lasted for 1 month or more. Please include breaks for maternity leave, time abroad, periods of study etc. Year Length Reason

Was the level of post on your return to work: Higher Same Lower

Career choices

We would like to know about the factors that have influenced your career choices so far.

Q8 Please indicate on the 5 point scale below, where 1 = not at all influential and 5 = very influential the importance of each of the following factors (add others if necessary).

1 Opportunity for self-direction
2 Opportunity to grow
3 Desire for recognition
4 Opportunity to work in a team/group
5 Better pay
6 Desire to be intellectually stretched
7 Opportunity to do innovative work
8 Opportunities for flexible working arrangements
9 Opportunity to be a leader
10 Desire for higher status
11 Desire to develop knowledge and skills
12 Need for job security
13 Opportunity to serve the community
14 Better promotional opportunities
15 Encouragement from peers
16 Encouragement from mentor
17 Desire to see results
18 Opportunity to work with people you respect
19 The desire to reduce stress
20 Family commitments
Other (please state below)

Q9 Can you identify factors influencing your career choices which were important in the past, but which are no longer significant? Please refer back to Q8 indicating the relevant numbers.

Q10 How do you envisage your career developing within the next five years? Please cross relevant boxes and add comments linking them to appropriate numbers.

1 Move to a larger college
2 Move to a job with a national or regional agency in education
3 Consolidate the role I'm in currently
4 Move to a smaller college
5 Move to a job out of the FE sector
6 Move into consultancy
7 Retirement

Background information about your career

We would like to know more about factors associated with your career progress.

Q11 As a result of your own job or your partner's, how many times during your career have you: because of your job 0 1-2 3-4 5+
because of partner's job 0 1-2 3-4 5+

Moved home
Commuted weekly to your job
Spent more than one month away from partner/family
Changed the school of your child/children (if any)
Spent more than 2 hours per day travelling to & from work

Q12 During your career have you ever:

Worked overseas
Travelled overseas as part of work
Shared a job
Been made redundant
Had an acting post
Moved sideways to get a different perspective
Been moved sideways as part of a re-organisation
Been seconded within education
Been seconded to/from education

Q13 How many days sick leave do you average in a year?
0 1-3 4-6 7-10 >10

Please indicate below your most advanced academic qualification, mode of study and whether or not you were given support from your employer to achieve the qualification.

Q14 Qualification Part-time Full-time

A level, HND or equivalent, First Degree, ACSET, Professional
MA, MBA, M Phil, PhD, Other

Q15 Have you ever received support from an employer to improve your qualifications (e.g. study leave, fees paid etc).

Q16 During the last 12 months, how much time have you spent on your own professional development?
5 days or less 6-10 days More than 10 days

Q17 Please indicate any management/personal development activities you have attended which were particularly significant for you and your career.

Activity Offered by Reason this activity was important

Your typical work pattern

The following questions are concerned with how you spend your working time.

Q18 On average, how many hours per week do you work?
30+ 40+ 50+ 60+

Q19 Is this more or less than the average number of hours you worked per week in the job before this one? Less More Same

Q20 On average, what proportion of this time (%) is now spent working:
in your own college at home,
elsewhere in education (e.g. committees)

Q21 On average, how many hours per week do you work:
[0 1–2 3-4 5+] before 9 am after 5 pm at weekends

Q22 What demands are there on your time in addition to those indicated above? *[Number of hours per week: 1–5 6–10 11–15 over 15]*

Work-related study
Other study
Writing for publication
Lecturing or teaching
Looking after children
Looking after other family members
Other domestic duties
Voluntary work/public duties/other *[please specify below indicating number of hours spent in each case]*

Personal information

We would be grateful if you would answer the following questions about yourself.

Q23 What is your age? 25-30 32-35 36-40 41-45 46-50 51+

Q24 Are you: Married/living with partner Single
Divorced/separated Widowed

Q25 How would you describe your ethnic origin?

White	Black Caribbean	Black African
Other Black	Indian	Pakistani
Bangladeshi	Chinese	Other

Q26 Are you registered disabled?

Q27 Do you have any children? If yes, please give their ages.

Q28 How old were you when you had your first child?
<21 21-30 31-40 41+

Q29 Please complete the table below with all the posts you have held. The information about the path your career has taken is very important to this survey. Alternatively, please feel free to enclose your CV.

Employer	Job Title	
Full-time/part-time	From:	To:

Q30 What do you feel are the guiding principles and belief systems that affect the way you manage your college?

Q31 Can you identify a single event, experience or turning point in your life/career which has shaped the way you see yourself and your abilities?

Q32 Which of your personal qualities or other factors have enabled you to achieve principalship?

Q33 Do you have any particular strategies for managing yourself and your workload? Please comment below.

Q34 To what extent would you say that your career has been planned?

Not at all Hardly At certain stages To a considerable extent
Please comment

Q35 What advice would you offer women in the sector who would aspire to a senior post?

Q36 What would you consider to be the key elements of a career plan in further education?

We would welcome any comments you wish to add regarding your career or this survey in general. Please continue on a separate sheet if necessary.

Appendix 2:

Interview questions

At the one-to-one interviews, principals were asked to expand on some of their responses to the questionnaire, which they had previously completed.

In addition they were asked the following:

Q37 Have you experienced particular lucky breaks in your career progression?

Q38 Have you experienced barriers to your career progression?

Q39 What do you think are the barriers to career progression for women now?

Q40 Research suggests that some aspects of family experience are influential;

e.g. position in family, close relationship with father, working mother, family crisis at young age

Do you feel any of these have influenced your career?

Q41 How do you think your staff would describe your management style?

Q42 What words would someone who knows you well use to describe your personality?

Q43 How would you describe your approach to dealing with the internal 'politics' of the organisations you have worked for?

Q44 Where does your career 'fit' in terms of its priority in your life?

Appendix 3:

'Go for it!' – respondents' advice to women aspiring to senior roles in FE

Towards the end of our questionnaire we asked women principals what advice they would offer to other women aspiring to a senior post in the FE sector. Their responses were diverse, full, warm and often witty, and we felt they merited being included in full. We have organised the responses around a number of common themes, but they are otherwise in random order.

On confidence and career decisions

- Go for it and have confidence.
- Be brave.
- Work hard.
- Don't be put off by jealousy and back stabbing.
- Be sure that it is the job you want, not the status or to prove a point.
- Understand the essential sacrifice you will make – not least of which is standing out from your erstwhile colleagues.
- Create time, space and development opportunities for yourself.
- Look at the quality of people already there and have confidence!
- Be sure that this is what you really want. Life at the top is not easy, particularly for a woman.
- Harden yourself to the criticism and knocks that are likely to occur.

- Believe in yourself and your own ability to succeed.
- Ask yourself why you want it. Weigh up the pros and cons – and there are cons. Once you've decided to go for it, stick to the decision. No post is all reward and no sacrifice. Examine your ability to cope with stress; the more senior, the more stress – honestly!
- Think very carefully about it: being a principal in the FE sector is a very undesirable job at the minute because of the level of external and internal stresses. If determined (and we need good female principals) do some careful thinking and get feedback on your strengths and weaknesses, interests/dislikes and apply honestly. Have confidence in your way of doing things.
- Don't be afraid to take risks in career terms. Don't linger using the excuse that the present job isn't completed to avoid risks.
- Go for it!
- Don't believe that you can have everything. Every decision you take to do something means you can't do something else or can't do it as well; decide what price you are prepared to pay for what you want (there is always a price); realise that senior posts carry with them the responsibility to have to face unpleasant decisions and do nasty things; never pour out the tea or coffee in mixed groups!
- Work hard (but have balanced life and interests). Contribute to development (but organise routine efficiently).
- Develop self-confidence.
- Be very clear with what you want from the post.
- Do not take on such roles if you are not 'hungry' for it. So know yourself and listen to yourself. If you think it's right, you feel you're good enough, go for it.
- Retain sense of proportion and ability to laugh.
- Have confidence in your own abilities.
- Don't wait to be cajoled or persuaded by others.

- Argue your case strongly in letter of application.
- Have confidence in yourself. Senior posts are not impossible, they are developments of what you are already doing.
- Go for it and do it your way.
- Persevere – you will have to be rigorous in your self-evaluation but that is a strength. The problem can be other people's.
- Keep trying – ensure you do a good job at each stage.
- You must not be defeated if rejected but try again.
- Do not be guilty if you relish people management more than student interaction
- Be prepared to work extremely hard, consistently month after month, year after year. Don't take on the job unless you are prepared to do this.
- Look ahead, look around and have good luck!
- Do it!
- Be confident that you have the necessary qualities and skills – be honest and realistic about . . . your wants.
- Believe in yourself, learn to absorb useful critical evaluation but do not indulge in self-doubt.
- Be flexible, assertive.
- Turn all opportunities to advantage.
- You have to want to do it. You must recognise that there can be personal cost.
- Feel confident about things you are good at.
- Don't assume that there is a blueprint of a good principal – you can be your own person – it's just that you have to convince others that their image may need some modification. Take people with you. Be prepared to move jobs. Not many achieve seniority in their own college.
- Seize opportunities!

- Aim high.
- Go for it – hugely demanding but intensely interesting and worthwhile.
- Think carefully – is it worth it?
- If you want it sell yourself hard.
- Basically go for it if you are confident that you can do it.
- Don't underestimate what a senior management post demands.

On skills and experience

- All principals need financial and personnel experience; take a job in a college where they have devolved budgets and be sure you have a line management role.
- Get a good ground in MIS and financial management.
- Learn the job as you go along – be keen to take on new challenges.
- Try to get a balance of experience and knowledge (especially funding/finance and MIS!).
- Practice articulating what you do in current management language.
- Work shadow someone/some other people. It isn't glamorous and may not be what they really want!
- Plan qualifications so that you have a 'take-off threshold' equal or better than most in the field.
- Acquire management training and experience.
- Undertake training and staff development activities consistent with own specialisms, network, participation in external interviews, build up self-belief.
- Get on one or two good management courses and if it might help go on a good all-women's management course.
- There is a need to excel in tasks undertaken.

- Need to analyse those skills and qualities needed to be successful, analyse oneself and draw up personal learning plan in order to put themselves in the best position . . .

On men and the 'glass ceiling'

- Be prepared to work harder than most men.
- The only way to beat the system that I have found in what is still a male dominated profession (FE senior management) is to consistently deliver what you promise rather than talk about doing so to little tangible effect. If at interview you can demonstrate that you achieved targets as well as set them, there can be little argument with your ability to succeed.
- Resist demand from staff/students for a 'mother' figure.
- Go for it. Recognise the strengths of being a woman (rather than reflect on the weaknesses). Be prepared for change (and welcome it as an opportunity). Don't worry about not having a traditional hierarchical career route – jobs in 21st century will require.
- Be as determined as you can. It can take many interviews (up to five on average) to secure the next position of promotion. Don't give up.
- Never give up! The glass ceiling does exist so don't assume your problems are necessarily your own fault.
- Expect to be patronised – but do not accept patronisation.
- Expect to have to prove yourself to a greater extent than male colleagues.
- Be prepared to work twice as hard.
- Be thick skinned with male colleagues – the tension between not colluding but not appearing 'neurotic' – difficult!
- You don't get there by 'Buggin's turn' if you're a woman.

- Don't try to be a man – build on the skills and abilities and beliefs you have as a person and as a woman. Make sure that the people you work with and for are aware of your contribution in a subtle and politically astute manner.
- . . . never pour out the tea or coffee in mixed groups!
- Don't believe in much of what you are told about male attitudes. I have never found men-women issues a problem. People/personality issues, yes; I have worked well with both men and women and felt that being a woman is often an unfair advantage because there are so few of us. We do have to earn respect to some extent – but so do men in high positions.
- It's still a male-dominated area. Be at least as good as the men are.
- Specialise in areas less frequently associated with women managers, e.g. finance, accountancy, estates, industrial relations, employment law, etc.
- If you aspire then 'want'. This is the same for men.
- Dress the part – wear a jacket . . . always.

On support

- Identify a peer group/support network.
- Delegate as much domestically and professionally as you can.
- Buy in all the support you can get.
- Network with supportive peers and mentors.
- Appoint people who will push your development!
- Set up networks of support with other women managers – not necessarily in education.
- Be determined – have a strong support system. Mentor if lucky!
- Find a mentor – everyone needs someone to talk to.
- Get close to people you respect and learn from all that happens.

- Network and maintain contacts/accept appointments outwith college.
- Learn to use other people. Many women managers feel they must do everything, e.g. research, write papers, double check figures. Use your specialist staff.
- Cultivate relationships with other principals – network. Get a high profile locally.
- Talk to others who have made it – role models are probably important for many.
- Make sure you get an independent supervisor.
- Network/be active outside the present job.

On family

- Decide on a strategy which fits into your family arrangements if you have a family. Moving children to suit a career causes too many problems.
- Be prepared to move.
- Do you really want to devote all your life to a single cause and lose out on so many other things? If you're prepared for that sacrifice then be ready to take on the less popular jobs and do them well.
- Ensure that you have a life outside college.
- Be prepared to accept that there will be demands on your personal life and plan to deal with these demands.
- Recognise that it will be demanding on your time, energy and emotion, that it will put a distance between you and your junior colleagues and there will be many times when the job will have to take priority over family/self.
- Cherish family support.

- Think through the implications for your personal life – write these down, consider them and then go for it with a fuller understanding of the implications. Develop a personal support system and your own strategies to cope.
- Be prepared to be lonely.
- For women, home is your issue not the employer. Priorities can always be matched and met.
- Don't have children.

On values

- Be clear about your own principles and values where you cannot compromise.
- What drives me, I think, is a belief in creating a college where learners get a superb deal, because education and empowering people matter. I think that unless you are motivated by some ideal you won't cope with the stress. Making people redundant. Challenging poor performance, living with a decreasing budget are my reality and not fun – students and learning still make me tick. You have got to know why you want it.
- Be clear what you want, why you want it and be true to yourself and your own style, values and beliefs.
- . . . openness and cherishing people . . .

Useful contacts

Network for Women Managers:
Lesley Easton
NWM Administrative base
c/0 YHAFHE
Business & Media Centre
13 Wellington Road (East)
Dewsbury WF13 1XG
Tel: [01924] 450900

Other relevant contacts/networks:

British Federation of Women Graduates
4 Mandeville Courtyard
142 Battersea Park Road
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Tel: [0171] 498 8037 Fax: [0171] 498 0173
Executive Secretary: Mrs AB Stein

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